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ABSTRACT

The development of a field-based teacher education program is described. Following a brief outline of the current status of the program and obligations to be met by the prospective teachers involved, the problems faced by the program implementors are discussed. The major problems were originally organizational and administrative. In the course of program development problems involving individuals' differing role perceptions, governance, financing, and balancing theory and practice were encountered. How these were met and overcome is discussed. The positive aspects of the program are evaluated and future developments are considered. (JD)

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The Evolution of a Field-Based Elementary Methods Program: Past Problems, Present Status, and Future Directions

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An almost endless bibliography of literature criticizing teacher education could be amassed with little effort. One of the most frequently heard criticisms is that education is not "relevant" to the students that it serves. (1) Another parallel concern is expressed by those who speak of "accountability"--namely that the benefits of education should be commensurate with the expenditures of public funds. One contemporary attempt to alleviate such shortcomings has been made through the development of field-based teacher education programs. "Anyone who has done his homework is aware of two sequential themes in the current literature of teacher education. (1) The problem of educating a professional practitioner who is relevant to the needs and crises of the times has been recurrent for a decade, and (2) as a solution to this problem the theme of experiential teacher education is currently being proposed." (2)

In the Spring semester of 1973, the College of Education of Texas Tech University, in an attempt to meet the needs and concerns of many individuals, moved one section of four different elementary methods courses off campus and into the public schools. This article will follow that particular field-based program through its several years of operation--focusing on its present status, past and current problems, and future decisions.

CURRENT PROGRAM STATUS

From its inception, this program, has consisted of a 12 semester hour blocking of four methods courses--science, arithmetic, social

studies, and language arts. This grouping is known officially as TAPE-II (Theory and Practicum, Elementary). Twenty-five junior and senior students are enrolled in each of two TAPE-II sections. Participation in one section of the program requires no specific prerequisite courses, nor are the students programmed into any special sequence of courses after the TAPE-II semester. Participants in the other section had been grouped together the previous semester in TAPE-I (Child and Curriculum, Educational Psychology, Children's Literature, and Reading), and eventually these students will be programmed to move into TAPE-III, a different type of student teaching experience geared toward the student with extensive field experiences.

TAPE-II students meet in two elementary schools, from 8:30-11:30 Monday through Friday. They participate in a variety of learning experiences such as the following:

1. Teaching in a controlled situation: Teaching a lesson to a group of one to five elementary students while being supervised by a professor or peer team members.
2. Working as a teacher's aide: Working in an assigned elementary classroom, under the direct supervision of the classroom teacher. At the beginning of the semester the TAPE student is an aid one morning per week and by the end, he or she will be in the classroom two or three mornings per week. Of the time in the classroom, one half hour is devoted to carrying out specific assignments given by the professors which require working with a group of one to four elementary students. Two and one half hours are devoted to aid activities, assisting the teacher in

any way possible with the emphasis on helping individual students.

3. Observing master teachers: Watching the professor and/or cooperating teacher work with the elementary students.
4. Participating in university class work: Interacting in a manner similar to a regular campus-based methods class, but focusing more on the field experience.
5. Interacting with public school personnel: Working with teachers, principals, supervisors and other school personnel.
6. Interacting with public school resources: Working with textbooks, nonprinted materials, media resources, office equipment, and the like.
7. Working on independent study assignments: Completing out of class assignments--readings, activities, reports, etc.

A more detailed description of the current program status is given by Bremer in "A Model for Field-Based Learning." (3)

PROGRAM PROBLEMS

The problems associated with this field-based program have been varied, but can be grouped as follows:

1. Problems due to insufficient organization and planning, and lack of time to do so. These problems have been well recognized by many individuals and groups as they have developed and worked in field-based programs. "A quality program of experiential ecucation for teachers entails precision planning and cooperation between school and college. Field experiences often run into difficulties because cooperating teachers and administrators

have needed more orientation and preplanning than originally thought necessary to provide adequate laboratory arrangements." [4] "A great deal of joint planning and goal setting by the college of education and participating schools must precede all field based activities. All those who are involved must have a legitimate role, not just in supervision but also in governance and planning." [5]

Many factors must be carefully considered, planned and organized in order to provide an effective field-based program. Some of the more pressing considerations are:

a. The need to establish a "high level" committee, including personnel from the schools, university, community, service centers, and professional organizations, which can effectively coordinate the field-based programs with appropriate liaison personnel.
b. Organization of "lower level" teams of university and public school personnel to supervise and instruct in the teacher education program.
c. A need to restructure existing college courses to fit into, and benefit from the field-based setting.
d. Provision for the adequate supervision of field students.
e. Availability of classrooms for field-based students in the elementary schools. Field-based students have more than doubled the classroom positions that used to be needed just for student teachers.
f. Planned experiences for TAPE students--observation, controlled

teaching, working as an aid, etc. There is so much potential in the field-based program that it is difficult to decide which activities are the most valuable.

g. Development of inservice programs for the field-based personnel. There is a need to organize in such a way as to allow inservice activities to flow from school to college personnel, as well as from college to school personnel.

Problems with inservice are often compounded by many university and school personnel who feel that the best inservice meeting is no meeting at all.

2. Problems due to the changing roles of various personnel, the resulting confusion about role responsibilities, and the mutual distrust between the various individuals and groups.

"All those involved must have a legitimate role, not just in supervision, but also in governance and planning." [6] The University-public school coalition has verbally accepted this statement, but the development of the TAPE-II program has been dominated by the university. Although unplanned, this University dominance has occurred as the result of an attempt to control the college student's experiences in the field. There was the need to avoid the problem reported by Balka. "Attempts to provide more classroom work have, in many cases, prepared prospective secondary teachers not to be active participants in instruction but to be 'expert' operators of mimeograph machines and paper cutters" [7] The university is concerned that many public school teachers do not have the time

or qualifications to take an active role in preparing teachers. Also, there is a question whether college accreditation agencies will accept extensive use of public school personnel as teachers of the college students.

It is important to note that the above concerns can be reversed and be applied to the university by the public schools people. [8] The main question they ask: are University professors and students qualified to work with elementary children, and are the activities with the elementary children beneficial for them?

Another problem concerning role differentiation is expressed by Taylor. "...taking the university instructors out into the schools did not change them. They were prone to teach their same old courses in the new setting. They talked about schools and pupils as though they were miles away when in reality the class was located inside a school with high school students everywhere." [9]

3. Problems that arise due to the difficulty of balancing theory and practice. Many of the TAPE-II students, after having worked with elementary students and teachers, have expressed that there really isn't so much to teaching-- it is just a matter of going into the classroom and doing it. Some cooperating teachers have left the TAPE students with the impression that all one has to do to teach is to open up a textbook. "It is easy for interns and staff to develop an anti-intellectual attitude, especially when the learning on site is going well and making

an impact." [10]

4. Problems due to the cost of the program. Several questions come to mind: Should the public school teachers be compensated for their work with the college students? A college professor working in the field often works with fewer students than he could work with on campus. Is the cost of additional professors justifiable? What about the cost of transportation to the students as well as the faculty? In general, if there is a large shift of teacher education into the public schools, how will the costs be defrayed?

5. Additional problems such as the following:

   a. Lack of an adequate research-evaluation basis upon which to make decisions.

      "...while the university students have had extensive field experience, it is still not clear how best to use this experience in order to gain maximum student growth. In fact, students who had less field work gained as much experience as those in this program who had extensive field experiences." [11]

   b. Lack of adequate rewards for involved personnel for the time and effort required for the development of such new programs.

   c. Lack of adequate space in the schools to handle the college class meetings.

   d. Differences between the university and public school dress codes.

e. Differences between the university and public school calendars.

f. College students becoming overwhelmed with the problems of the "real world." As Taylor said in discussing his students who worked with disadvantaged youths: "They understood the problems, but they were not able to accept the challenge."[12]

g. The inability to control and standardize teacher's usage of the aides.

h. Attempts to maintain good public relations between the university and public schools which often leads to situations where things that need to be said and done are not. This can be a particularly difficult problem for new programs.

This field-based program has certainly had problems, as TAPE students during various evaluation sessions have willingly pointed out. However, as one of the students emphasized, "The program could have been ten times worse, but still have been one hundred times better than any education course I've had on campus."

PROGRAM VALUE

The TAPE-II program has proved valuable in various ways to the college students, classroom teachers, professors, and elementary students involved.

For the college student, the program has:

1. Provided professional experience in a diversity of environments with different socio-economic and ethnic groups, at different grade levels, in open-space and traditional buildings, with teachers of varying philosophies and teaching styles;

2. Assisted in the process of deciding upon job preference within education, or deciding if teaching was even the right profession;
3. Assisted in securing jobs. (Galler reports a study at Illinois State University showing that a higher percentage of graduates from their experiential program get jobs than do students who go through the regular teacher education programs on their campus; (13)
4. Helped develop more positive attitudes toward teaching and children;
5. Provided many opportunities to try out "new" educational ideas in controlled (small groups) settings;
6. Assisted in the development of teaching skills and methodologies;
7. Facilitated social and personal interaction with college professors and fellow students in the program; and
8. Allowed the students to get to know what a "third grader" can do and "looks like!"

For the classroom teacher, the program has:

1. Fostered differentiated staffing. By using the TAPE student as an aide the individual needs of the elementary student can be met better;
2. Given teachers a meaningful way to contribute to the improvement of the profession by having a definite role in the training of future teachers;
3. Opened new roles to the teachers. In the past, teachers striving for "upward mobility" worked toward administrative or counselor positions, both of which removed the teacher from the

classroom. Field based programs now allow the alternative of working with college students in the elementary classroom as a teacher educator. [14]

4. Provided the teachers with the college professor's expertise and the resources of the University, including ready access to new methods, ideas and suggestions.

For the college professors, the program has:

1. Allowed them to give their college students a more meaningful preparation for becoming a teacher.
2. Provided the opportunity to lessen the time between the advent of new education knowledge and the application in the classroom.
3. Given an opportunity to narrow the gap between the "ivory tower" and the "real world." This also allows the professor the chance to demonstrate that his abilities are not just theoretical, but thatindeed he can apply theories, clinically.
4. Led to better rapport with the college students. The simple act of being together for longer periods of time was of major importance.
5. Opened up the doors to the advantages of team teaching both with public school personnel and with other college professors.
6. Provided the opportunity to recieve immediate feedback from classroom teachers on the effectiveness of the teacher training program.
7. Provided professors the opportunity to observe the students in teaching situations to better evaluate their future potential as teachers.

For the elementary student, the program has:

1. Provided another adult model in the classroom; and
2. Created a situation whereby their individual needs can be better met.

For all individuals and groups involved, TAPE-II seems to have helped to better meet the needs of the elementary and college students through a closer meshing of theory and practice and by allowing teams to develop so that a great deal of expertise is shared. According to Spillane and Levenson, "The skills needed by a teacher are essentially those of dealing with people: students, parents, community people, fellow staff members. These can best be learned in real situations. Ideally, a student would learn to teach by teaching under competent supervision with frequent opportunities for discussion of the events of the day with supervisor and colleagues." [15] The field based program has fulfilled an important role in providing the opportunity for the development of these skills. Also, the field based experience provides the opportunity of a college student to "screen" himself out of teacher education before he gets to the final stage of student teaching. In view of these advantages, the field based programs do provide another vehicle to make teacher education more relevant, and in general to improve the profession.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The future of field-based programs at Texas Tech revolves around several questions:

1. If field programs are valuable, as subjective evaluations

indicate they are, should they be expanded to include clinical experience for all teacher education students? If so, how can additional professors and classroom teachers be enticed into the time-consuming job of developing and working in field-based courses?

2. Are there additional field experiences, such as faculty exchange programs, that should be included in the overall field program?
3. Are there elements of teaching that transcend a given school setting and which should be considered for field-based programs? Collea and Pagni (16) state, "There is a degree of futility in preparing prospective teachers via the usual practice of attempting prospective teachers to duplicate experiences found in actual teaching situations. These kinds of pre-service experiences are erased by the normalizing process of the school organization." The authors suggest future work should focus on "Developing elements within the prospective teacher which would transcend the school organization" Examples of these elements are the ability to develop rapport with students, self-perception, role, perception, and effectively giving and receiving affection in classroom situations. Along this same line, Harp (17) suggests that future work should focus on assisting students to develop "concerns" for the problems of education. His line of reasoning is that the irrelevancy of methods courses may not be in their content, but rather arise because the students have not had enough experience in public shcool settings to develop concerns that match the content of the courses.

4. How are the increased costs of such a program to be defrayed?
5. What is the role of protocol materials? Can they provide certain needed experiences?
6. What are some alternative models of field experience programs that need to be developed? Of particular concern with the TAPE-II program is the degree of cooperation between the university and public schools. If a true coalition can be formed between the various groups, then a "coequal team" model can be developed whereby university and public school personnel have equal responsibility in this teacher education enterprise. If such a union cannot be effected, then a "university-dominated" model will probably evolve. The first model is the preferred one, but can all the inherent problems be overcome?
7. Can we effectively expand the coalition members, so that the community, professional organizations, and service centers are involved actively with the public schools and universities in the entire teacher education process?

John I Goodlad (18) suggested that one of the reasons that college students are more critical of education courses than academic courses, is not that the education courses are really worse than the academic ones, but that the students are expecting more. They come to education programs expecting that here is where they finally learn to teach. When the courses prove to be of no more value to the actual act of teaching than their last history class, they rightly become critical. The students

expect something different and are not getting it.

Movement into a field setting does give the student something different, and with it comes an immediate positive reaction from many sources that teacher education has improved. There is need for caution, however. Although there is strong subjective evidence that teaching methods courses in the public schools is better in general than teaching them on campus, there is a great need for an evaluation-research basis that will allow more objective decisions to be made.

It is time for very open and candid discussions between all concerned groups--universities, public schools, lay public, service centers, and professional organizations--as to the future directions of teacher education. If our ultimate goal is to better meet the needs of the first grader, the junior high science student, the high school English student, and the college education student, then we must consider how we can work together to do so. Field-based education has much promise. At this point we need to use it wisely, and carefully so it does not merely become another "bandwagon" or addition to the educational jargon.

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